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NEHRU AND VILLAGE INDIA

An Assessment of Nehru's Philosophy of Social Action

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I

As a leader of the Freedom Movement and as the first Prime Minister of Independent India Jawaharlal Nehru played an important role in the socio-economic transformation of the country, including its thousands of villages. But it is not easy to make an assessment of his role in the transformation of India's villages. For one thing what he attempted to do for the villages in the country was part of his broader programme of social reconstruction. Also although Nehru tried to shape the course of events in India during the significant decades before and soon after independence, what really happened in the country at that time were not entirely his doing; a variety of social forces were in operation, and in this paper it is impossible to attempt to examine them all and to evaluate Nehru's role in that wider context. Hence I shall confine myself to a rather limited task. In his approach to particular problems of society Nehru kept in mind what he called the need for "an organic sense of social life". In appraising Nehru's attitude towards the rural problem in our country and his efforts to solve them, it is important to see what his own frame of reference was about social problems in general. In Section II of the paper, therefore, I try to piece together largely from Nehru's own writings and pronouncements what may be considered to be his philosophy of social action. Against that background in Section III, Nehru's approach to village reconstruction is outlined. The concluding section attempts an evaluation of Nehru's programme of action with special reference to villages.

II

Nehru's mission in life, as that of most leaders of the freedom movement, was to bring about a major transformation

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of Indian society. P.C.Joshi points out that in this sphere "Nehru's contribution lay in wholeheartedly welcoming the industrial civilization and in linking Indian nationalism with the perspective of India's transformation into an industrial society."[1] There were many in the freedom movement who identified the anti-colonial thrust of the movement with a call to return to a romantic past. To some a return to the golden age of the past was a religious obligation; to others it was a moral imperative. Nehru's historical role lay in upholding the distinction between the colonial tyranny of England (and of the West) and the scientific outlook and technological progress which emanated in the West, but which he believed must become the experience of all humanity, those whom Gandhiji described as "the dumb semi-starved millions scattered over the length and breadth of the (Indian) land in its 700,000 villages" being no exception to it. Nehru was proud of India's past. But he was not going to bask in the past glory of the country or to join in the chorus asking for a return to that glorious past. "India must break with much of her past and not allow it to dominate the present", he declared. "Our lives are encumbered with the dead wood of this past; all that is dead and has served its purpose has to go."[2]

Nehru placed great stress on science, and on the scientific method. He was convinced that the application of science was inevitable and unavoidable for all countries and peoples to-day. And he found it necessary to emphasise it over and over again because of the strong body of opinion which prevailed in the national movement, against any attempt to pollute the pristine purity of the Indian tradition with the science and technology of the West. Nehru was not a blind admirer of modernization or technological progress. But he was sure that the scientific approach was necessary for life itself and the solution of its many problems.

Nehru's thinking on social problems was influenced by almost all ideological currents of his times.[3] It will be

fair to state, however, that the greatest influences on his thought - on the shaping of his own social philosophy - were Marxism and Gandhi. More precisely he was influenced most by Marx's writings and by Gandhi's life. His social philosophy evolved through his attempt to put these two in juxtaposition. What he found attractive about Marxist literature and Gandhian actions was that both were geared to the transformation of society.

It is not easy to say what particular writings of Marx or of Marxists Nehru found most appealing or which aspect of Marxist thought influenced him most. Certainly he was no scholar in Marxist literature. But in his autobiography he states explicitly that it was the scientific outlook of Marxism that appealed to him most. "The theory and philosophy of Marxism lightened up many a dark corner of my mind. History came to have a new meaning for me. The Marxist interpretation threw a flood of light on it, and it became an unfolding drama with some order and purpose, however unconscious, behind it. ...The great world crisis and slump seemed to justify the Marxist analysis. While all other systems and theories were groping about in the dark, Marxism alone explained it more or less satisfactorily and offered a real solution. As this conviction grew upon me, I was filled with a new excitement..."[4] A second factor that Nehru found attractive about Marxism was that it was instrumental in bringing about the revolutionary social transformation in the Soviet Union. Nehru was a great admirer of Lenin both because he succeeded in adapting Marxism to suit the conditions of his own country and because he translated the revolutionary urge of Marxism into practice. His visit to the USSR in 1927 gave him an opportunity to witness for himself the manner in which a new social order was being built up there in the midst of many odds. He wrote later: "I had no doubt that the Soviet Revolution had advanced human society by a great leap and had lit a bright flame which could not be smothered, and that it had laid the foundations for the new civilization towards which the world could advance."[5]

Nehru's Marxist convictions were clearest in the early thirties. In one of his writings in 1933 he stated unambiguously: "The true civic ideal is the socialist ideal, the communist ideal"[6], and also, "...fundamentally the choice before the world to-day is one between some form of Communism and some form of Fascism... There is no middle road between Fascism and Communism. One has to choose between the two and I choose the Communist ideal".[7] And in two chapters in his autobiography (Ch LXII "Paradoxes" and Ch LXIII "Conversion or Compulsion") he attempted a "marxist" critique of Gandhiji and the Congress. "Many of Gandhiji's activities might lead one to think that he wants to go back to the narrowest autarchy, not only of a self-sufficient nation, but almost a self-sufficient village... Of necessity that means an extremely low standard of living... The huge populations of to-day would not be able even to subsist in some countries, they would not tolerate this reversion to scarcity and starvation... Personally I consider it undesirable from every point of view. Inevitably we are led to the only possible solution — the establishment of a socialist order, first within national boundaries, and eventually in the world as a whole, with a controlled production and distribution of wealth for the public good."[8] "The Khadi movement, hand-spinning and hand-weaving which is Gandhiji's special favourite, is an intensification of individualism in production, and is thus a throw-back to the pre-industrial age. As a solution of any vital present-day problem it cannot be taken seriously..."[9] "The land system which we have is collapsing before our eyes, and it is a hindrance to production, distribution and any national and large scale operations. Only a radical change in it, putting an end to the little holdings and introducing organised collective and cooperative enterprises, and thus increasing the yield greatly with much less effort, will meet modern conditions."[10]

It would appear that Nehru had arrived at a "marxist" understanding of the problem of Indian villages as

also a "marxist" solution to them. But Nehru was far from becoming a marxist or a communist. His approach to Marxism was always ambivalent and showed some basic reservations. He had indicated these reservations in many of his writings. For instance, towards the end of his autobiography he said: "As between fascism and communism my sympathies are entirely with communism. As these pages will show, I am very far from being a communist. My roots are still perhaps partly in the nineteenth century, and I have been too much influenced by the humanist liberal tradition to get out of it completely... I dislike dogmatism, and the treatment of Karl Marx's writings or any other books as revealed scripture which cannot be challenged, and the regimentation and heresy hunts which seem to be a feature of modern communism. I dislike also much that has happened in Russia, and especially the excessive use of violence in normal times. But still I incline more and more towards a communist philosophy."[11] A few years later in the early pages of Discovery of India Nehru seemed to indicate that he had deeper philosophical doubts about Marxism.[12]

A further reason why Nehru did not commit himself fully to Marxism was his feeling that somehow there was a gap between Marxist theory and Indian reality. The Indian reality as he understood it with all its paradoxes and contradictions was reflected in the life of Gandhiji. "What a wonderful man was Gandhiji, after all, with his amazing and almost irresistable charm and subtle power over people. His writings and his sayings conveyed little enough impression of the man behind; his personality was far bigger than they would lead one to think... He came to represent India to an amazing degree and to express the very spirit of that ancient and tortured land. Almost he was India, and his very failings were Indian failings."[13] Through Gandhiji's life and concerns, Nehru felt, he could understand India and "the dumb semi-starved millions" in her villages more than through the most rational and convincing theory. And, if it was a question of bringing about change, Nehru believed that Gandhiji would bring

it about through the force of his life and actions, if not through logic and arguments. "Ideologically he (Gandhiji) was sometimes amazingly backward, and yet in action he had been the greatest revolutionary of recent times in India. He was a unique personality, and it was impossible to judge him by the usual standards, or even to apply the ordinary canons of logic to him. But because he was a revolutionary at bottom and was pledged to political independence for India, he was bound to play an uncompromising role till that independence was achieved. And in this very process he would release tremendous mass energies and would himself, I half hoped, advance step by step towards the social goals."[14] Also "Always we had the feeling that while we might be more logical, Gandhiji knew India far better than we did, and a man who could command such tremendous devotion and loyalty must have something in him that corresponded to the needs and aspirations of the masses... In spite of his peasant outlook, he was the born rebel, a revolutionary out for big changes..."[15]

In shaping his own social philosophy Nehru, the political leader with "the urge to action", and with "the desire to experience life through action" had to decide what he should cling on to — the Marxist revolutionary thought or the Gandhian revolutionary action. The choice would not have been easy if it were to be consciously made. But the choice was made for him by the course of events. Nehru describes it at length in his autobiography. "We called ourselves modern, and thought in terms of 'progress', and industrialisation, and a higher standard of living and collectivisation. We considered the peasant's view point reactionary, and some, a growing number, looked with favour towards socialism and communism. How came we to associate ourselves with Gandhiji politically, and to become, in many instances, his devoted followers? The question is hard to answer, and to one who does not know Gandhiji, no answer is likely to satisfy. Personality is an indefinable thing,

a strange force which has power over the souls of men, and he possesses this in ample measure, and to all who came to him he appears in a different aspect. He attracted people, but it was ultimately intellectual conviction that brought them to him and kept them there. They did not agree with his philosophy of life, or even with many of his ideals. Often they did not understand him. But the action he proposed was something tangible which could be understood and appreciated intellectually... step by step he convinced us of the rightness of the action, and we went with him, although we did not accept his philosophy... Vaguely we hoped that Gandhiji, being essentially a men of action and very sensitive to changing conditions, would advance along the line that seemed to us to be right."[16] The commitment to Gandhiji was, therefore, an act of faith and of hope. Nehru believed it was wrong to deflect attention from the immediate goal of independence and expected that after the attainment of independence it would be possible and easier to press for a radical economic programme of his own choice.

But, of course, this was not to be. Having decided to follow the Gandhian path upto independence Nehru found it easier to continue along the same path even after independence. He accepted the basic Gandhian premise that change must be gradual and democratic without causing any major upheaval of any kind. Gone was the fervour of the thirties to bring about radical changes in the structures of society. The commitment to change remained, but it had to be peaceful and orderly.

To Nehru this switch over from radicalism to gradualism appeared justified on various counts. There was, first of all, the example of Gandhiji himself. "Gandhiji always sought to function within the social fabric in which the masses had been living for centuries and tried to bring about gradual but revolutionary changes, instead of destroying the fabric or uprooting the people from their soil", said

Nehru in an interview in 1960.[17] "He insisted on continuity with the past and accepted the existing social system as a base for his political and social strategy." His interviewer posed the following question to Nehru: "Gandhiji sought to bridge the class difference between the Haves and the Have-nots with the astounding theory of trusteeship and trust. Why, he almost handed over the trusting lamb to the trusteeship of the tiger! The question is: Have you come round to accept the Gandhian solution of class synthesis in preference to the Marxist approach to class struggle?" To this Nehru replied: "Class struggle is there always. One cannot deny it or put it aside. But the solution need not be one of violence or struggle or hatred: and that's where Gandhiji's peaceful approach, friendly and constructive approach, comes in ... Marx was conditioned by his times where there was no democracy or franchise, no working class movement and, well, simply no means of resolving inequalities and equalizing society other than struggle... So while not denying or repudiating class contradictions, we want to deal with the problem in peaceful and cooperative way by lessening, rather than increasing these conflicts and trying to win over people instead of threatening to fight them or destroy them. Gandhiji perhaps wasn't conscious of this class struggle aspect in the way you and I are. But his solutions are more applicable to our time and, particularly, our land. Our history and traditions show this way - that is, the advantage of peaceful, friendly and cooperative solutions."[18]

Nehru found other reasons to support the gradualist approach. He had great faith in the power that people would have as a result of the introduction of adult franchise and the parliamentary form of government. "When everybody has a vote it becomes a power exercising certain pulls, certain effective pressures, in the direction of social change to an extent that Marx could not have conceived simply because the picture was not before him. Then other further democratic factors come into the picture, like trade union organisations, worker's organisations, peasants'

organisations - all exercising powerful pressures upon the wealthy ruling classes in favour of what might be called the beginnings of economic democracy. The result was that the Marxist fear in the context of the Industrial Revolution that there would be greater and greater concentration of wealth and power in fewer and fewer hands, extending and widening poverty did not really occur."[19] Further, it was his belief that the scientific and technological revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had substantially solved the problem of production bringing the goal of material prosperity within the reach of all. Hence through proper distributive measures it would be possible to share the growing abundance more equitably among all sections of society without going through the traumatic experiences of overthrowing the existing order and the arbitrary use of power. Taking all these factors into account Nehru indicated that his objective was "to achieve a secular, socialist, cooperative society by planning through a legislative revolution, using parliamentary democracy as a suitable means to the achievement of this end."[20]

It is thus clear that although Nehru had made many radical claims about his intentions in an earlier phase of his life, he decided on an entirely different course of action after he came to power. When his power of action was limited he envisaged a radical transformation in the Indian social order; when he had the power to act, he settled for a mere 'peaceful transition'.

III

Nehru's approach to villages must be seen against this background. Nehru has recorded that his first encounter with the village scene had left a deep and disturbing impact on him. This happened in 1920 before he started figuring in national politics. Some two hundred <u>kisans</u> had come to visit him and other leaders of Allahabad city to draw the attention of the

prominent politicians to their remote village, and spent three days with them. Later he wrote about this episode in his autobiography: "Looking at them and their misery and overflowing gratitude, I was filled with shame and sorrow, shame at my own easy-going and comfortable life and our petty politics of the city which ignored this vast multitude of seminaked sons and daughters of India, sorrow at the degradation and overwhelming poverty of India. A new picture of India seemed to rise before me, naked, starving, crushed, and utterly miserable."[21] It also led him to say: "The problem of to-day in India is the problem of the peasantry."[22]

But the verdict of biographer Gopal is that this did not mean much. According to Gopal "what, in fact, Jawaharlal hoped for was to link kisan discontent with nationalist politics. He had made no study of economic and land problems and he had no clear ideas about peasant participation. It was not his intention to provide a revolutionary dimension to Indian nationalism. But this contact with the kisans was satisfying psychologically, as it gave him the feeling that he was re-indianising himself and functioning in a wholly Indian situation."[23] Later on in life too, he found it psychologically satisfying to keep talking about the problems of rural India, but he did not seem to have recognised that they required any detailed analysis. As he saw it the real issue was to decide how to bring about a gradual revolution to enlarge the possibilities of human development for even the poorest in the land without unleashing unpredictable social chaos and violent upheaval. According to one commentator: "The solution, according to Nehru, was to be sought in using the vote to build up mass consciousness, in holding elections to overcome mass inertia, and in introducing institutional changes at the village level to spur the organisation of the most disadvantaged groups in class-based political associations. Political democracy could bring to bear the strength of numbers of the poor in such powerful pressures on the ruling classes

that they would be compelled to move in the direction of economic democracy. At the same time, readjustments in the distribution of economic and political power would occur, it was hoped, against the background of increasing productivity, and could therefore be accomplished with a minimum of disruptive violence."[24]

More specifically Nehru's village reconstruction programme consisted of legislative measures, institutional reforms and introduction of science and technology which together formed something of a package. At one stage Nehru was very sceptical about parliamentary democracy because he thought its methods were slow and cumbrous and unsuited to a period of rapid change.[25] But in the changed circumstances he found it one of the basic instruments of change. He meant to use it both as a means to educate the villagers about their civic rights and responsibilities and as a forum of popular participation. Nehru must have been in parliamentary democracy based on adult franchise something of a counter to the power of caste solidarity and communal feelings that formed the basis of village life. Unlike many leaders of the freedom movement, including Gandhiji, who may have found some validity for the traditional caste hierarchy in Indian society while condemning the social evils of caste, Nehru believed that the caste system itself must disappear. And he held the view that "if merit is the only criterion and opportunity is thrown open to everybody, then caste loses all its present-day distinguishing features and, in fact, ends.. Any such attempt to open the doors of opportunity to all in India will release enormous energy and ability and transform the country with amazing speed."[26] The principle of "one-man one-vote", the legal provisions against the age-old practices of untouchability and special opportunities for educational, economic, and cultural growth to the backward sections of society appeared to Nehru to be necessary and sufficient conditions to break down the hold of the caste system over the rural scene in India. So the legal provisions within the framework of parliamentary democracy were seen as efforts

to bring about social change in the villages through political processes. Legal actions were initiated in the economic realm as well. The abolition of Zamindari was the most spectacular among these. Nehru wanted Zamindari abolition to become a revolutionary measure and tried to get the compensation clauses of the Zamindari Abolition Acts exempted from judicial review under the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution, but his efforts failed, and large sums had to be paid to the Zamindars. Even so, Nehru considered Zamindari abolition a major step forward and held it up frequently as an example of a silent revolution through legal channels.

Nehru knew also that new institutions had to be developed in the rural areas so that a sense of community based on the free and active cooperation of equals would become a reality. The Community Development Programme, the cooperatives and the Panchayats were to be these new institutions in the villages. Nehru had great expectations about each of these. The inauguration of the Community Development programme in October 1952 was for Nehru the small beginning of something big. He said: "We are now talking in terms of a big revolution, a peaceful revolution, not a turmoil and the breaking of heads. It is in this manner that we shall transform our country. Peacefully, we shall remove the evils of our country and promote a better order." Since the Community projects were meant to raise the levels of living of all sections of the rural areas, it would appear that Nehru believed that the experiment would receive the wholehearted cooperation of the villagers in general. He expected also that Community Development would bring about a non-political organisational approach to mobilise public opinion and effort at the village level. Other instruments of collective rural improvement also were thought of and introduced. The revival of the old panchayats was one such effort. It was expected that the revival of this traditional institution would symbolise the recognition of the fact that all that was worthwhile from the

past would be preserved. At the same time reconstituting the panchayats on the new principles of adult franchise was expected to bring new content and style into the working of old institutions to fit in with the ethos of the new era. The cooperatives were also meant to impart a new spirit of reconciliation and forward thrust in the villages. The cooperative approach seemed to be the most appropriate for what Nehru had once described as the "problems of individual and social life, of harmonious living, of a proper balancing of an individual's inner and outer life, of an adjustment of the relations between individuals and between groups, of a continuous becoming something better and higher, of social development, of the ceaseless adventure of man."[27] It also satisfied the socialist urge to reverse the trend towards individualism and the Gandhian concern not to play up class divisions.

The application of science and technology to increase agricultural production and to change the surface of the rural areas was to take place in the new institutional mould thus provided. Planning which Nehru once described as 'science in action' was to be the envelope for the many new projects and programmes to be taken to the villages. They included modern agricultural implements, quality seeds, fertilizers, insecticides, irrigation facilities and credit. Roads and communication facilities to open up the remote villages and draw the villagers into the mainstream of national life were also part of the same package. So were the health and rural sanitation schemes, and the attempts to develop and modernize the village industries. The emphasis on primary education and the efforts to start a programme of adult education were also related to the same drive. Nehru attached great significance to this aspect of the village development programme. In his interview with Nehru, Karanjia had asked whether a programme of the kind that Nehru was envisaging could be put through without a cadre based political party. Nehru's reply to the

question was quite significant. "The real cadres are being built at the village level all the time" he said. "They are not party cadres in that sense: they are village level workers, agriculturists, peasants - that type, whom we give proper training... The main point is that we are making these village organisations responsible for practically all the development work, except some very big scheme which needs outside assistance. We give them competent people to help and advise, competent engineers, animal husbandrymen, health men, education men, all at the block level. That type of institutional change coming about is basic."[28]

These, then, were the main elements of Nehru's strategy to revive and reconstruct India's villages. It was a bold attempt to break down the traditional pillars of village society, to refashion the institutional framework of village life, to bring into even the most isolated villages a new sense of dynamism and modernity, to impart to the neglected and downtrodden in rural India dignity, a sense of purpose and of hope. It was an attempt to achieve all these and much more with full participation of the masses under State direction through a cadre of technicians, administrators and scientists. There is reason to believe that Nehru believed that what he was attempting was a socialist revolution by consent and without class wars, heretics or victims.[29]

IV

We can now try to see what impact Nehru's philosophy of social action and his attempts at social reconstruction had on Indian villages.

In terms of the village development programme and of economic policy in general of the post-independence period, one of the greatest achievements of Nehru was that he was instrumental in preventing what might have easily turned out to be a return to the past to the extent that such backsliding is historically possible. P.C.Joshi is right when he says that in a demoralized,

disunited and despondent India both Gandhi and Nehru uttered the word 'forward'[30]. And yet it seems to me to be fair to say that Gandhi's forward movement was essentially or at least substantially rooted in the Indian traditional ethos. Nehru perhaps justifiably feared that the Gandhian way might encourage revivalist and obscurantist forces. He also did not share Gandhi's concept of village self-sufficiency even as an ideal. Neither did he go along with Gandhi in the view that higher standards of living and of leisure would themselves lead to self-indulgence and sin. Nehru brought into his approach to the village problem a panoramic understanding of the evolution of human society as a whole, of the achievements of mankind elsewhere through science and technology, of the deprivation that one section of mankind imposes on others through colonialism and imperialism, of the possibilities of human liberation through revolutions. Through his writings and speeches Nehru insisted that the problems of individual Indians -- including the least among them - and of individual villages - including the most isolated of them - must be seen in this wider context of a forward moving human endeavour. Nehru realised also that speaking and writing were not enough to put across this idea. Gandhiji's communication technique was primarily his own life and example - a life of simplicity and religious devotion in tune with one strand in the Indian tradition. Nehru knew that Gandhiji's example moved the masses. But Nehru's knowledge of Indian history and of human nature indicated to him that other styles of living were also compatible with the Indian tradition and would have popular appeal. So Nehru conveyed his message to the masses through a life of elegance distinguished from vulgar affluence, a life nurtured by secular convictions which posed no affront to religious feelings, a life geared to science and modernisation which did not call for the discarding of all past traditions. Indian villagers accepted both Gandhi and Nehru but it seems reasonable to say that they found Nehru's vision of the future more acceptable than Gandhi's.

Nehru also saw the Indian villages as part of the totality of the Indian economy. He did not agree with the view that a solution to the problem of the villages, particularly the economic problems of poverty and unemployment, could be found in the villagers or through the rural areas alone. His emphasis on industrialisation and on basic industries may have appeared as a deflection from the needs and requirements of the villages. But Nehru realised that a long term solution to the economic problems of the villages could come only through rapid and sustained industrialisation apart from improvements in agricultural productivity and land reforms.

An important by-product of Nehru's confrontation with the Indian reality was the new connotation he was able to give to the concept of modernisation.[31] To-day it is readily granted that modernisation is not westernisation. But when Nehru appeared on the scene modernisation was nothing other than westernisation both for those who opposed it and for those who supported it. By showing that the true spirit of ancient civilizations, as living in India's villages for instance, could be preserved and indeed could become a corrective to some aspects of modernisation as it had emerged in the West, Nehru necessitated a reexamination of the concept itself. In this respect he found not only liberalism but also Marxism - at least as it was being expounded in his times - to be too much grounded in Western history and Western experience. His critique of Marxism for not recognising what "lies beyond the mind" arose from this concern. This is why also he was quite candid in his confession of "a sense of mysteries, of unknown depths" although he was also an agnostic and a man of science.

Nehru's concept of modernisation had its deep impact on village India. The opening up of thousands of villages and their linking up with other villages and the urban areas brought a new dimension to the traditional Indian villages.

Electricity and irrigation pumps, mills and motor cars, touring cinemas and trading centres did come to the villages. It will not be an exaggeration to claim that during a decade and a half of the Nehru era Indian villages experienced more changes than they did in any other fifteen years in the past. The combined effect of universal adult franchise and Zamindari abolition did succeed in something of a realignment of the power structure in the villages. In the traditional village set up, ownership of land and caste considerations tended to combine power in the hands of a few belonging to the top caste.[32] But post-independence legislative measures - universal adult franchise, Zamindari abolition and legal measures against untouchability in particular - brought about a downward shift in power and also introduced different centres of power in the villages. Nehru claimed this to be the most solid and revolutionary achievement of his philosophy of gradualism and expected, and indeed argued, that this was only the beginning of a process and that through the same procedures further downward percolation of power and of economic progress could be brought about.[33]

Today we know that it was too romantic an expectation. Villages in India did change under Nehru's programme of modernisation, but it is now a well documented fact that these changes have had but little impact on the lives of the bulk of the people. On the contrary they formed the basis of the growth of a new power elite in rural areas who, in the sixties and seventies took full advantage of all the modernisation measures to enrich themselves while mass poverty and unemployment still continue and caste oppressions have not abated either.

Why is it that Nehru's dream of resurgence in rural India did not come true? A proper answer to this question would call for a detailed evaluation of the social and economic processes and policies in the country since independence. I have touched upon some aspects of it in my <u>Poverty, Planning and Social Transformation.</u> Here I shall concentrate on Nehru himself and his philosophy of social action.

It seems to me that in his philosophy of social action Nehru had succumbed to a three-fold illusion - a Marxian illusion, a liberal illusion and a Gandhian illusion. In his writings on India and of the impact of the East India Company and British rule in India, Marx had given some vivid accounts of the 'idyllic village communities' of the pre-British days. He found them 'contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery' with their 'undignified, stagnatory and vegetative life' which he believed formed 'the solid foundation of Oriental despotism'. Marx had also noted the way in which British colonialism had brought about the ruin of these village communities. And although he found all this sickening he also saw England ('whatever may have been her crimes') as 'the unconscious tool of history' in bringing about a social revolution in India and Asia without which mankind could not fulfil its destiny. Marx also made the prophecy which became famous:"I know that the English millocracy intend to endow India with railways with the exclusive view of extracting at diminished expenses the cotton and other raw materials for their manufacturers. But when you have once introduced machinery into the locomotion of a country, which possesses iron and coals, you are unable to withhold it from its fabrication... The railway system will therefore become in India truly the forerunner of modern industry... Modern industry, resulting from the railway system, will dissolve the hereditary division of labour, upon which rests the Indian castes, those decisive impediments of Indian progress and Indian power."[34] Marx's diagnosis of the Indian situation and his prophecy about the future of India have a certain logical appeal about them. Colonial rule will introduce railways although 'actuated only by the vilest interests'; railways will introduce modern industry; and modern industry will undermine the traditional village social structure. There has also been a tendency to consider that the prophecy made in the mid-nineteenth century was fulfilled by the middle of the twentieth century and that colonialism and capitalism had completed their historic role

of disintegrating the traditional village structure of India.[35] What I referred to as the 'Marxian illusion' is the belief that that process of transition is already a thing of the past and that it has already brought about and completed a major social revolution in the Indian villages. It would appear that Nehru suffered from this illusion because he envisaged that his own historic task was a reconstruction of an already destroyed village community. This led him to believe that building up a new sense of community in rural India was both necessary and possible.

On the possibilities of renewing a sense of community in the villages Nehru became a victim of the 'liberal illusion'. The basis of the liberal illusion is the view that society is merely the sum of free and independent individuals. Whatever may have been his philosophical views on this subject Nehru acted on the basis of this assumption. He tried to strengthen the individualist base by constitutional guarantees and legal provisions, attempted to bring together free individuals into cooperative associations, and was largely oblivious of the social forces of class and caste that were at play in the villages. One of the few occasions when Nehru made a serious bid to bring about even a minor change in property relations im the rural areas was at the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1959 where the resolution on integrated programme of agricultural development suggested cooperative joint farming "in which the land will be pooled for joint cultivation, the farmers continuing to retain their property rights, and getting a share from the produce in the production of their land." To Nehru this was probably one more effort to bring together independent individuals for the benefit of all. And it is clear that he was totally unprepared for the hostile reaction that the resolution produced within the Congress and from many other sections of the population, including the 'liberals' in the country.[36] He did not seem to think also that giving up the

proposal of cooperative joint farming made much of a difference to his rural programme. Equally revealing was his belief that programmes meant for increasing agricultural productivity - and the Community Development programme was originally and essentially little more than that - could be easily converted into programmes for mass participation if only they were accompanied by the appropriate rhetoric.

On the question of caste Nehru was a combined victim of the 'Marxian' and 'Gandhian' illusions. He believed that the economic changes brought in by the British rule had substantially eroded the caste basis of village life and that his own programme of rapid industrialisation and parliamentary democracy would wipe out the vestiges of caste. This was supplemented by the 'Gandhian illusion' that the basic problem of caste was untouchability. In his interview with Karanjia he pointed out approvingly that Gandhiji "sought the weakest point in the armoury of caste structure - that is, untouchability - and by undermining and dynamiting it, he shook the whole fabric without the people realising the earthquake he had unleashed. In this way Gandhiji introduced new and revolutionary processes in the mass mind and brought about mighty social changes."[37] There is even a more surprising instance of Nehru's surrender to Gandhian illusion. Again, in the interview with Karanjia Nehru was defending the Gandhian principles of non-violence, synthesis, cooperation, coexistence and progressive equalization as against conflicts and wars. And he said: "There is one more factor which comes into this picture of class struggles and wars and all that. It is the atom bomb... The atom bomb threatens to blow up civilization with one or two or three bangs - thus this emergence of such a destructive weapon makes conflict or war, be it in the form of class struggle or capitalist-socialist conflict, simply so disastrous that it is impossible to think of solutions in terms of violence at all. Hence, from any point of view the concept of class struggles or wars has been out-dated as too dangerous

at a time when not only nations but groups or even individuals can be put in possession of weapons of enormous destructive potentiality."[38]

Living in a world of such convenient illusions Nehru failed to come to grips with the realities around him. In a letter to Chief Ministers in 1956 he talked about the political, economic and social revolutions and said: "Only by way of advance on these three separate lines and their integration into one great whole, will the people of India progress."[39] Nehru desired the integration of political, economic and social forces in operation in society, but failed to see how they interact. For instance, he did not seem to have anticipated that the political processes based on individual vote and ideological considerations would lead to the revival and strengthening of certain forms of caste solidarities. Again, while he recognised the economic power of growing private enterprise in the country and thought of a strong public sector as a countervailing economic power, he did not seem to have realised the extent to which private economic power would make inroads into the political processes. And while he enthusiastically propagated scientific methods of production in agriculture and industry he did not appear to have been aware of the fact that in a basically market oriented and profit motivated system rapid growth would tend to increase economic and social inequalities which the legal system by itself would not be able to prevent. He failed to see also that his "efforts at revolution by participation and consent were being converted by influential sectors of Indian society into a revolution by revisionist methods, thereby reducing it into no revolution at all."[40]

Nehru's programme of village development failed also because of a lack of clarity about long-term objectives. Negatively he set himself against both Western capitalism and Soviet-type communism. There was much that was valid in his

critique of both these systems. But he did not struggle with the issue of the characteristics of the new social order that should be and could be brought about in the country, but preferred to attempt an artificial amalgam of what he considered to be the good features of capitalism and communism, glorifying it also into the philosophy of "the mixed economy".

It is not only that Nehru felt that the long-term goals of a new social order were simply matters of mental synthesis, but he seemed to think also that they could be achieved through a programme of state intervention alone. In any conscious pattern of social transformation the state plays an important role, but the character of that transformation will depend on the specific forms of the involvement of the state in that process. Hence it is important to probe into the nature of state intervention that Nehru envisaged and carried out. To Nehru state intervention was primarily an administrative procedure consisting of legal enactments followed by bureaucratic implementation. It was always the state doing things for the villages and the people, with the people themselves having few opportunities to make decisions or influence the implementation. Even when some local level institutions like the Panchayats were revived or created, they were extremely restricted in scope and severely circumscribed by the legal and administrative frame that little that was creative could have been expected from them, and they could not have become the instruments of any kind of radical transformation. With the character and extent of popular participation so well curbed, state intervention proceeded along well laid out administrative routes. It is not surprising, therefore that Nehru's philosophy of social action with a great deal of radical flavour about it in its pronouncements transformed itself into a pathological and self-defeating gradualism. Nehru's obsessive desire to play down, if not altogether evade, the whole problem of basic conflicts of interests in society and consequently his

unwillingness to postulate radical discontinuities in the social processes also led him to make compromised which, under conditions prevailing in the country, could have been only to the advantage of the rich and the powerful. Through such measures the machinery of state itself came more and more under the powerful grips of a small minority always striving for more power and more wealth.

It is, therefore, difficult to accept the view frequently put forward that Nehru's chief inadequacy lay not in his faulty vision, but in his failure to create new instruments with which to implement the programmes of national development and social change.[41] Nehru did create instruments to implement his programme, and they served the purpose well, but his vision and programmes were totally inadequate to open up a new chapter for the vast majority of people in our country, particularly for the poorer and weaker sections in the villages.

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Notes

1. P.C.Joshi: "Gandhi and Nehru: The Challenge of a New Society" in B.R.Nanda, P.C.Joshi and Raj Krishna ed., Gandhi and Nehru (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1979).
2. Jawaharlal Nehru, Discovery of India, p.522.(Citations from Meridian Books, London, edition 1956).
3. "Almost all the ideological currents of the past half century appealed to his keen and receptive mind; first in time was classical liberalism with its emphasis on individual rights; then at Cambridge he was drawn to Fabian socialism; thereafter he was influenced by the Gandhian stress on the purity of means and the message of non-violence; and in the late twenties and thirties by Marxist theory and the gospel of a classless society. He was also attracted to the ethical norms of Western humanism, and later, during his long war-time imprisonment, to the precepts of the Vedanta." Michael Brecher, Nehru: A Political Biography (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959, Abridged edition) p.231.
4. Jawaharlal Nehru: An Autobiography, pp 362-63 (Citations from Allied Publishers, edition, 1962)
5. Discovery of India, p.15.
6. Jawaharlal Nehru: Recent Essays and Writings, 1934, p.139.
7. Ibid, p.126.
8. An Autobiography pp.522-23
9. Ibid p.523
10. Ibid p.524
11. Ibid p.591
12. "Much in the Marxist philosophical outlook I could accept without difficulty: its monism and non-duality of mind and matter, the dynamics of matter and the dialectics of continuous

change by evolution as well as leap, through action and interaction, cause and effect, thesis, antithesis and synthesis. It did not satisfy me completely, nor did it answer all the questions in my mind, and, almost unawares, a vague idealist approach would creep into my mind, something rather akin to the Vedanta approach. It was not a difference between mind and matter, but rather of something that lay beyond the mind." Discovery of India p.15.

13. An Autobiography p.508

14. Ibid p.365

15. Ibid p.255

16. Ibid pp.254-55

17. R.K.Karanjia, The Mind of Mr.Nehru (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1960) p.22.

18. Ibid pp.76-77

19. Ibid p.29

20. Ibid pp 57-58. The words are Karanjia's in the form of a poser, but Nehru gave his assent to this formulation.

21. An Autobiography p.52

22. Ibid p.368

23. S.Gopal, Jawaharlal Nehru - A Biography (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1979 - Vol I) p.48

24. Francine R.Frankel, India's Political Economy 1947-1977: The Gradual Revolution (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978)p.xiii.

25. An Autobiography p.530.

26. Discovery of India pp.534 & 535.

27. Ibid p.17

28. R.K.Karanjia, Op. cit pp 72-73.

29. S.Gopal, A Biography Vol II p.307

30. P.C.Joshi, loc. cit., p.34.

31. This point is dealt with in some detail by P.C.Joshi, loc.cit.

32. See Andre' Beteille, Caste, Class and Power (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971) pp 198-201.

33. See R.K.Karanjia, op.cit.

34. Quoted by R.Palme Dutt in India Today(Revised and enlarged Edition, 1947) Ch.iv.

35. "The capitalist unification of India based on the destruction of the village autarchy and cooperation on the narrow village scale paved the way for higher forms of economy and social collaboration. It paved the way for a national economy and nation-scale collaboration among the Indian people. It became the material premise for the emergence of the Indian nation out of the amorphous mass of the Indian people which, before this unification, were scattered in numerous villages between which there was very little exchange, social or economic, and hence, which had hardly any positive common interests. However tragic, the destruction of the autarchic village and the collective life of the people living in it, it was historically necessary for the economic, social and political unification of the Indian people. Social progress is achieved, as history shows, through the amoral action of historical forces. It should not be forgotten that these villages were the stronghold of social passivity and intellectual inertia reproducing the same type of existence for ages. They were powerful obstacles to all attempts at unification of India in the past. We need not shed any reactionary tears over their extinction." A.R.Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism (Bombay, Popular Prakashan, Fifth Edition, 1976) pp 49-50.

36. For a discussion see Francine Frankel op.cit., pp 164 ff.

37. R.K.Karanjia, op.cit., p.22

38. Ibid p.77 (emphasis added)

39. Quoted by S.Gopal op.cit. Vol II p.313.

40. Ibid p.308

41. See P.C.Joshi, loc.cit., p.49 and also R.K.Karanjia op.cit., pp xv & xvi.